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EXCLUSIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ONLY EGYPTIAN FAMILY THAT STILL SPEAKS THE COPTIC LANGUAGE INSIDE EGYPT

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- There are only four families who speak the Coptic language, and most of the members travel to Canada, Australia, or the United States.
- The number of people who speak Coptic reaches around 300, and no one is still in Egypt except the family of Titti Mouris. At home, their children speak Coptic.
- Titti Mouris: Egyptians must learn their mother language, which is Coptic that has been developed from hieroglyphics, besides keeping their Arabic language.
- When we are in a midst of a group of people, and one of my children does something bad, their father speaks to them in Coptic and smiles because no one understands what he is saying to them – but the children understand and behave themselves.

The Coptic language counts to be one of the lost languages – it does not exist in the Coptic life and is only used in European Universities and academic associations except Egypt, which is the source of this language. While there are still some people who speak this language, this is the only family in Egypt who inherited this language generation after generation. They still use it as the communication language between them. It is noteworthy that the Egyptian modern language kept a lot of words from the Coptic language, which is still in use until now. This is despite the impression, which some people get, that this is a religious language. However, Titti Mouris Abdel AlMessih, the housewife, is the only housewife who speaks Coptic. She and her children live in Alexandria, and she denied that the Coptic language is a religious language. This is clear in her dialogue with us and she exposed how much she loved this language, and the reasons why they use this language until now. We asked her in the beginning:

Q: Is the Coptic language a religious language, which means is it only to be used by the Christians?

A: The Coptic language is the old Egyptian language, the "hieroglyphic" language. Since the old Egyptian language used to be written by drawings, for example the letter A or Alpha, used to be drawn in the image of a bird. The image has been short cut to become the letter "a" in the Coptic language. The development from the old Egyptian language to the Coptic language came as a result of the complications of what the ancient Egyptians faced in writing and expressing themselves in pictures. It is noteworthy that the Coptic language has different slangs – one is in the north, and the Upper Egypt slang, which is used in Upper Egypt. But, the core is the same – it is one language and one meaning.

Q: Why did you decide to learn the Coptic language and use it in daily life?

A: When the number of speakers of the Coptic language decreased through the centuries, and started only being used by the Church through prayers and hymns, it was important that Egyptians figured out ways to revive this language side to side with the Arabic language. For example, in the country between the two rivers, they speak the Arabic language with their mother language, Farci or Kurdish. Another example, the people of Syria – some of them still speak Aramaic. The reason is that we have revived the Coptic language is to save our culture before it disappears and dies from one side. From the other side, it is to preserve the Coptic identity, which is the old Egyptian identity. We are Egyptians – we



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have to preserve our Egyptian identity, and we call on all Egyptians to learn the Coptic language, even if they have to fight for its revival while keeping the Arabic language in the first stage without letting go of Egypt's first language.

Q: Who were the first ones to teach the Coptic language to the kids, and how did this happen?

A: There were individual attempts to revive the Coptic language. For example, from the people who taught the Coptic language is the family of Ekladios Bek and Besenti Rezkalla. He is my grandfather from my mother's side, and my father Mouris Abdel Messih. So, Besenti Rezkalla taught his whole house the Coptic language, and he used to encourage them and give them money if someone learned a new sentence reading, writing, and pronouncing from the Coptic language. By this way, it was for him to create the first family in Alexandria that speaks the Coptic language.

Q: How does your family continue to preserve the Coptic language?

A: The 2nd generation grew up talking the Coptic language fluently. It was always preferred that we would marry someone who speaks the Coptic language, or who was willing to learn it before he joined this family. Also, they started calling their children with all Egyptian names like Thotmos, Htaso, Sotah, Titti, Tari, Siti, Nofer, and Rano. Before that, Ekladios Bek started in Cairo by teaching his family to speak the Coptic language, so the number of people who speak the Coptic language became about 250-300 people. They are all in four families, from now those have traveled to Australia, Germany, Canada, and United States.

Q: When you decided to get married, did your husband also speak Coptic?

A: No, my husband didn't have any idea about the Coptic language. I remember when my husband came to ask for my hand, and when he first heard this condition, he requested that the first thing he learned was the swearing words and the love words. He also asked if there is a language exam prior to getting married. Now, he speaks the Coptic language fluently like the Arabic language.

Q: What are the ways you follow when teaching your children the Coptic language?

A: There is a way which I learned from my Father: in order to learn a new word, he would write it in Coptic on a piece of paper, and hang it on the wall or door so we could see it all the time and learn it and not forget it. While we are together in the house, we speak the Coptic language. Also, we talk with another Coptic family outside Egypt through chatting in the Coptic language, since we are using a Coptic program on the computer.

Q: What are the funny situations that you experience when you use the Coptic language?

A: One of the funniest situations is when I went to buy vegetables, and while I was in front of the merchant, I wasn't thinking straight so I spoke to him in Coptic. The man looked at me strangely, and left me and went inside his store. Another time my cousin and I were in school in the first week of the first grade, and he wanted to go to the bathroom, and he asked the teacher for this in Coptic. The teacher didn't understand, and he didn't know the teacher didn't understand, and it was very hard situation because he was a child and he couldn't hold it. Also, when we are in the middle of a group of people and when my kids do something bad, their father yells at them in Coptic but smiles because he knows no one understands what he is saying – the kids know this, so they behave. Or, sometimes we are in a place when someone is not good or unwanted, so we say "naef nin," which means "this person is not good."

Q: Does your name, Titti, have to do with the Coptic language?

A: Titti comes from Nefertitti – Nefer means beauty, and Titti means a gift. Nefertitti means the beautiful gift.

Q: Are there words that we use in daily life that are close to the Coptic word?

A: Yes, we use many words that are close. For example:

Editor's Note: In the original Arabic article, there is a list of Coptic words and their equivalent in modern Arabic. However, this list is not translatable because the Coptic words

A: Of course, there are a lot of effects. We, as Egyptians, still use a lot of the rules from the Coptic language without noticing.

رجاء خاص	2008-03-01 12:48:03 / 6352
السيد المهندس كميل حليم تحية طيبة وبعد بعد تصفحي لموقعكم الكريم ارجوا معرفة رقم هاتفك التليفوني لمزيد من العمل والتعاون مع أقباط آخرون لهم نفس اتجاهاتك هل يمكنني الحصول عليه هذا إذا أنتم الي وفقك الله ولكم جزيل الشكر	Girl Of Egypt
	2008-03-05 08:44:52 / 6420
This is a truly wonderful article-loved all the insight that it gave me and answered many questions.Truly our egyptian coloquial is really coptic-Hoda wadie Halim	Anonymous
	2008-03-06 23:21:13 / 6465
انا نفسى اتعلم اللغة القبطية بس مش عارف كيف ابدأ؟	ميينا
موضوع غايه فى الروعه و الجمال	2008-03-08 17:11:15 / 6493

بجد موضوع جميل باشكرك عليه كثير
و باطلب طلب بسيط اذا كان في الامكان معلومات اكثر عن اللغة القبطيه

Hazem Laondi

Good job - Help?

2008-06-25 20:25:45 / 12182

Hey,

How're you?

I'm Michael and I'm a Christian Coptic that lives in Canada. I totally encourage you and I'm really glad to finally find out that some people still have that interest and I really want to learn the Coptic Language. Is there any help that you think you can provide? Recommended sites or people to contact? I'd be grateful.

Thanks a lot,

Michael

Michael

خالص احترامي لكم

2008-07-11 08:54:49 / 12635

الاحباء لكم مني كل احترام وتقدير
،،،،منذ زمن ابحت عنكم والان انا سعيد ان اكتب لكم اتمني ان اكون مثلكم انا وعائلتي فهل تساعدونا فأنتم خميرة صالحة ومباركة
+دكتور سامي عطية

Dr. Samy Attia Abdou

2008-07-16 19:48:11 / 12861

Hey,

I'm Muslim but I'm really interested in learning the Coptic language or at least contributing to its revival. I think it needs to achieve official language status. Maybe at least in some of the Governorates and cities first, and then the whole country. You and your family have a responsibility to go out and spread the language. I wish I could help but I'm way out in Canada.

If the Berber's have done it so can we Egyptians.

Even in Siwa there's only 15000 who speak Berber but they have held onto their language.

Ahmed

Wonderful

2008-08-02 19:16:35 / 13676

It is wonderful that you have revived your ancient language. I hope that others will follow your example. It is a living bridge to an ancient past full of so many vibrant people. God bless and protect you.

Gunar

Gunar Kravalis

revival

2008-08-16 20:57:54 / 14237

Just like how India's Government revive the Sanskrit as its official language, I think Egypt should also do the same before your sacred language lost forever.

Calvin Michel Sidjaja

2008-10-19 08:15:53 / 17757

Thank you for a brilliant article! I have learnt to read Coptic in a British university as part of my degree in Egyptology, and it's good to see that some Egyptians still use this wonderful language in daily life.

Anonymous

another person who speaks coptic language

2009-03-15 09:13:35 / 17966

There is another person who speaks the coptic language fluently and spent his life learn,teach and speak the coptic language.His name is Doctor Kamal Farid Isaac,he lived in Egypt.

Isis Kamal**Simply fantastic!**

2009-07-24 14:29:29 / 18190

Simply fantastic!

Simply Fantastic!

2009-08-14 16:06:39 / 18226

it is a pity that you did not feel that the translations could be done adequately, losing "all meaning and pronunciation". it would have been a little extra effort, but it could have been done in this manner:

(Coptic word)(phonetic pronunciation) (English translation) - (Arabic word) (phonetic pronunciation) (English translation)

I was going to give an example using the Coptic word for Aloe wood (labas), but every single online English to Arabic translator I found *also* translated the letters from Roman to Arabic (which, unfortunately, I cannot read.)

As an Egyptophile, however, this article was a joy to read, although I mourn the fact that the language itself has been almost expunged from daily Egyptian life.

Barry**coptic language**

2009-09-16 13:36:11 / 18287

iam thrilled to know that a family in egypt can speak coptic in their own home. you are a treasure and i hope you could write or record as much as you can from what you know about the day today vocabulary that may help to revive the lanaguge use again. there is a growing interest in the coptic language and the internet would provide an excellent medium of communication. i dream that one day the copts would speak their lost beautiful language again

Refaat Guirguis

2009-10-07 03:59:16 / 18303

I had absolutely no idea Coptic was dying out in this way, and I commend Titti Mouris for keeping it alive at least one more generation.

I agree with C M Sidjaja that Egypt ought to make Coptic an official language to try and preserve that five thousand year old link. But, I guess there\\'s a substantial portion of Egyptians who would be outraged at this insult against their g*d, their culture and their language.

sigh

Nefer**One language for one nation**

2010-02-09 13:23:47 / 25653

As a proud Egyptian nationalist, I am delighted that almost all Egyptians speak the same language, namely Arabic. The singularity of our language further strengthens the bonds between Egyptians, and I view any attempt to resurrect Coptic as a deliberate and scurrilous attempt to sow disunity among us.

It is sad that, even now, there are some Egyptians committed to the path of division, both

between fellow Egyptians, and between Egyptians and the rest of the Arab World. Nonetheless, the fact that only 300 people, almost all of them residing outside of Egypt, are pursuing this anti-nationalist policy is welcome proof that most Egyptians reject such insidiousness.

I look forward with great enthusiasm to the day when our country will no longer have to suffer such assaults on its unity, weak, ill-conceived, and doomed as they are.

One language for one nation!

Egyptian

2010-04-24 18:59:07 / 30470

Thanks for the very informative article!

Oshi

For the sake of diversity

2010-05-24 18:32:28 / 31713

I can understand that a country wishes to be united in every way when it comes to people and culture, but there is a reason for promoting diversity(you can have both!). It lies in the human nature to both differ and seek unanimity. Diversity is the key to success when it comes to producing new generations.

Tolerance is a virtue in many cultures and that must also include letting people live out ancient ones, such as the Coptic language. Not only does it promote diversity, it also provides a link to the past, so that we can be more closely knit to our history, to learn from our deeds, be it good or bad ones.

Who doesn't want to gain more knowledge? After all, knowledge isn't a heavy burden. Everyone should strive to become enlightened.

Nina

Site to hear coptic spoken?

2010-06-01 09:18:28 / 32122

Is there a website or CD one could purchase to actually hear the coptic language spoken or sung? Very interested!

Dianne Brown

Diversity..

2010-09-13 14:32:04 / 36309

We are dealing with Arabs here.. Don't know if you noticed.. They don't know diversity or tolerance: they are a hateful, savage bedouin people. These desert nomads have destroyed the great, ancient Egyptian civilization and have turned it into a replica of retarded, backwards Arabia. Great job!

About the Berbers retaining their language: They have had a very different history than us. The Berbers were very quick to fight off the Arabs and very soon gained independence; Between the 8th and 16th century their countries were ruled by them and not by Arabs Sijilamsa, Idrisids, Maghrawa, Almoravids, Almohads,Hafsids, etc were all Berber. During these powerful Berber empires, the Berber language and customs had room to breath. That is untill the arrival of the savage bedouin Arabs of the Banu Hilal. Since Islam arrived, we Egyptians have never been able to gain independance (from the Arabs and later the Turks).

Say what you want about the berbers, but they did what no other ethnic group within the Arab sphere have done: they succesfully fought and survied the Arabs. Can't say that about the Egyptians..

PROUD COPT

2010-09-13 14:44:03 / 36310

The Berbers have something we Copts have lost a long time ago: pride and fighting spirit. Also, their history is quite different from ours. They fiercely and successfully fought Arab domination, whereas we never did. The Berbers within decades of the arrival of Islam, gained independence and established their empires and states up until the 16th century (when the Arabs and Turks rose). The most powerful western muslim empires (idrisid, almoravid, almohad, hafsid, merinid) were Berber states. Egypt on the other hand has never had a native ruling the country since the Arabs arrived.

Also, don't forget: If it weren't for our religion, we would have never been a sense of being Coptice. We would have come to consider ourselves to descend from a bunch of bedouin nomads.....

Shnoep

Coptic language

2010-12-09 13:29:35 / 39643

It is well known that the language in the beginning was forbidden by the arab invaders and they were punishing the one they heard speaking it. As Coptic are not rebellious people and instead of fighting with arms they pray (always following the one who use the sword will die by the sword). The invaders were stronger beside islamising a lot with fear and the sword. They have also changed our culture by being submitted. In the fourties the Coptic school was teaching it but as a side line and when the government closed the school only the priest started to learn it. Which is so bad. because young I was speaking french, arabic, italian & greek.

I hope the new generation can start learning it.

Fathy

May the Coptic tongue be continuously spoken until present

2010-12-15 05:17:07 / 39920

It's very good ! but the Coptic tongue which one speaks, would represent an infime party of what should exist; unfortunately ; so, may one create an association for the defense of this tongue. My name is Abdelhak and I am already more than 43 years and 7 months at least old and I live in France where I inhabit at Nanterre [92000]. Here is my e-mail address : semail.abdelhak@neuf.fr . I am interested in the languages in general and which of notably the speeches, 'patois', creoles, dialectal complexus and dialects. Goodbye !

Abdelhak Semail [In Reality : Smaa3iin]

how wonderful

2011-01-03 10:39:51 / 41463

This is history in real time - keep it going. I loved reading it. I have just heard about the explosion in Alexandria on Christmas Eve and was shocked and appalled by the behaviour of the perpetrators. I decided to find out more about Coptic Christianity (I knew of it because I have spent time in Egypt and got to know some Egyptians) I didn't realise that the language had been going for so long- one of the oldest I would say. Perhaps it should be taught in schools - after all French, English, German, Russian etc. are learned so why not Coptic??

UK Citizen

We Are All Egyptians

2011-04-04 15:16:19 / 51081

Dear All,

I am a telecommunications drive test engineer, graduated from Ain Shams University, Faculty of Engineering in July 2007, served in the military as a radar reconnaissance officer from April 2008 to October 2010.

I am very interested in our great profound and long history and our Egyptian Language as well, I am studying now its grammar and vocabulary and I am working alone on a project to rewrite the Egyptian Language in the Latin alphabet exactly like the English Language, and to simplify its grammar from some complications and to purify its vocabulary from some of the Greek origin words. I am sure that one day our Egyptian Language will come back more strongly and more attractively.

Yours,

Wagdy Mahmood Alhanafi

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Cairo, Egypt

e-mail:wagdynnium@gmail.com

facebook:Wagdy Alhanafi

Wagdy Mahmood Alhanafi

I suggest that one writes a work about the Coptic tongue who speaks the Titti Mouris's family

2011-06-09 11:47:43
/ 56397

Hi ! I dare to request if the Coptic tongue that is to say the one who speaks the family of Titti Mouris, has been so in the dialectal form or not [attention ! I am going to employ a French word because I don't know how one says : >] one says this is the only family in Egypt who speaks this tongue generation after generation ; if it is the case, so may one say it to me by indicating me which type of Coptic tongue it would be. Thank you very much beforehand with gratitude !. A good meal beforehand !

Abdelhak Semail [In Reality : Smaa3iin]

2011-08-09 01:31:06 / 62132

I am glad to read the comments of various Egyptians including Moslems like Abdelhak Semail who believe in historical facts and feel the Egyptian blood did not cease to flow in their bodies. I also salute Wagdy Mahmood Alhanafi who showed this feeling. As the case with most nations, many people lived in Egypt and mixed with Egyptians, Greeks, Hebrews, Lybians, Africans,and of course Arabs, and Turks... But Egypt is Egypt, and we are all Egyptians. Still the ideological conflict about our identity, Arabs or Egyptians continues!

Fine, any way, I am one of the very small numbers who know and speak Coptic language since 1963; you see I am not that young. I knew Late MR Pimenti Rizkalla, grandfather of Mrs Titi Moris, and many members of her family. I am happy to communicate with those who are interested in Coptic, or like to learn it. It is amazingly so easy to master

Nabil Sabry Isshak

nisshak@gmail.com

Anonymous

chaima3

2011-08-26 08:03:23 / 63893

و الله انا كثير بحب الحضارة المصرية و الذي شغفني ان ابحت عنها هي قصة يوسف النبي

شيماء

Desire to learn Coptic

2012-01-10 15:49:30 / 88290

This is excellent. For almost ten years I wondered if there was anyone who spoke Coptic regularly, besides the Coptic Church. There is large community of people interested in learning the Coptic language here on the east coast of the United States. We have been using books and rules of linguistics, but have not heard it actually spoken. If anyone from the

Titti Mouris family, or any other speaks fluent Koptic please email me.

SAnkhRa2@yahoo.com

Sonjedy

Coptic language.

2012-01-14 08:19:00 / 88996

When some people want to keep their identity and not losing it among the invaders they have to keep it even hidden. It is true that the arabs or muslims did not want us to keep our language so that they can destroy our identity and become ARABS which we are not. (But they all Egyptians nowadays arabs) I reject that and always explain that I am not Jewish immigrant from many countries went to Israel not speaking jewish and their learned it and revived it but we can not do that we have to speak it at home. The Church should have dealt with this situation in Sunday schools but they preferred to read the bible in arabic instead of teaching the language which has relation to the religion. I think that it is not late we can still learn it and speak it in our home among ourselves and encourage this as our identity. Hope this can be done because it will join all coptics to go back to follow the coptic society of the first century. They did quite a lot socially but the invaders destroyed all that.

Fathy

I belive this is the language the spriit speaks though me

2012-01-30 13:25:17 / 91186

I am a born again believer and the holy spirit has been dealing with me early in the mornings it has given me some understanding i have what some would call the gift of the language and believe i also speak coptic when i received the hollyghost i spoke in a perfect spanish i know because their were people translating what i was saying it was the same as acts 2;4 in the holly bible speaking other languages in my mind usually when i pray i am being thankful when that happens the other language comes. Praise God the almighty, all knowing, spirit ! the spirit told me to record it and i did their is a message in it. i would like to here from you if their is a translator? let them speak. My nickname is Sunday. please call me if you are lead united states of America.

Shirley L .Scott Williams

is avilable

2012-03-10 19:02:21 / 98029

we are proud with our grand fathers coptic language is avilable online for any body to learn coptic language we hope to keep it alive ,thank you GOD bless you all if you would like to keep in touch for more comencation let me know I'm living in usa thank you.

Philippe Maximous

2012-09-01 15:48:36 / 184554

وسوف المرجعية بلوق والاختيار هنا مرة أخرى بشكل منتظم. www.copticassembly.org أنا أحب المعلومات القيمة التي تقدمها على ! أنا متأكد من أنني سوف تتعلم الكثير من الأشياء الجديدة هنا! حظا سعيدا لالقام

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2013-02-17 03:07:05 / 324147

ارجو معرفة عنوان هذه الاسرة

Anonymous

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